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ABSTRACT

Legislation supporting the mainstreaming of exceptional children is reviewed, and the Illinois Network of Exemplary Occupational Education Programs for Handicapped and Disadvantaged Students is described. Considered are P. L. 94-482, the Education Amendments of 1976; PL L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act; and P. L. 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is explained that the Illinois Network is designed to demonstrate exemplary methods of mainstreaming handicapped high school students in vocational education. (SEH)

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MAINSTREAMING THE HANDICAPPED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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MAINSTREAMING THE HANDICAPPED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Mainstreaming refers to the temporal, instructional, and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers. Mainstreaming the special needs student into the regular education classroom has been a common element of both vocational education legislation and special education legislation. This concept is supported by at least three major pieces of federal legislation. These three laws are:

Public Law 94-482: The Education Amendments of 1976
Public Law 94-142: The Education For All Handicapped Children Act
Public Law 93-112: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Each of these laws will be discussed in more detail.

Title II of Public Law 94-482 addresses Vocational Education. A major priority identified in 94-482 is the need to improve the quality of vocational education for all persons, especially the handicapped and disadvantaged. P.L. 94-482 states that persons of all ages in all communities shall have access to vocational training

-which is of high quality

-which is realistic for gainful employment and

-which is suited to the needs, interests, and ability of students to benefit from training.

In order to accomplish these goals, Public Law 94-482 provides that 20% of the funds made available to States be expended for programs and services that assist the disadvantaged student in a Vocational program. Ten percent of the funds are likewise earmarked to serve the handicapped student. In addition Subpart IV of the Act provides funds to pay the

full cost of the vocational education of disadvantaged persons in areas of the State that have extremely high concentrations of youth unemployment and that have high rates of school drop-outs. Throughout the legislation emphasis is placed on the involvement of special students in the regular educational process as much as possible. This emphasis on mainstreaming, as it is known, is also found in the Education For All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142

Public Law 94-142 has profound implications for special needs youth. This Act mandates a free, appropriate education for all handicapped children. A critical element of the law is the provision for an individualized education program for every handicapped student. The individualized program must include provisions for placing the student in the least restrictive educational environment. It is this aspect of P.L. 94-142 that is particularly important for vocational educators. As compliance with the Education For All Handicapped Children Act is achieved, it is to be expected that an increasing number of special students will be mainstreamed in regular vocational programs.

The accessibility of regular programs to the handicapped is linked to a third law--the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This Act is a civil rights law for handicapped persons and is designed to end discrimination practices based on a handicap. The law provides that programs and services shall be made accessible to the handicapped in all institutions receiving federal money. This responsibility is particularly important in the field of vocational education. Access to quality vocational training may be the critical factor leading to a successful future for a handicapped or disadvantaged person.

As can be seen, Congress has placed a major emphasis on the special needs learner. Compliance with federal legislation is sought at both the

state and local level. The State of Illinois has made several attempts to respond to the intent of Congress. This effort is reflected in the increased enrollment of handicapped and disadvantaged persons in vocational education programs. Since 1970, the enrollment of handicapped and disadvantaged persons in vocational education programs in Illinois has increased from 47,790 students to 142,000 students. As the number of special students in vocational education has grown, the Illinois Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education has recognized the need to provide educators with improved methods of teaching the special needs student in the regular class. One activity designed to meet this need was the formation of the ILLINOIS NETWORK OF EXEMPLARY OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR HANDICAPPED AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS.

The purpose of the Network has been to demonstrate exemplary methods of mainstreaming handicapped students in vocational education. A total of nine programs were developed at six comprehensive high schools, two Area Vocational Centers, and one community college. The nine sites have devoted three years to planning, implementing, and evaluating occupational programs for handicapped and disadvantaged students.

Since its beginning, mainstreaming has been a primary premise of the Illinois Network of Exemplary Occupational Education Programs for Handicapped and Disadvantaged Students. Some of the components that have been found to be necessary in order to effectively mainstream students in vocational education programs will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

Component Necessary For Effective Mainstreaming

In order to appropriately implement the mainstreaming concept, it

is first of all necessary to identify the type of student who might be eligible for special services. The federal government has developed definitions to assist with the identification of handicapped and disadvantaged students.

The term "handicapped" means persons who are mentally retarded, hard-of-hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, health impaired, or persons with specific disabilities. An important point to remember is that the condition is only considered to be a handicap if the student cannot succeed in the regular vocational program without special educational assistance.

The second term to be defined is "disadvantaged." This term refers to persons who have an academic or economic disadvantage, including those who have limited English-speaking ability.

The application of these terms to the identification of students in the classroom may be quite complex, particularly if a school district has a high number of disadvantaged and handicapped students. But unless a comprehensive method of identifying students is utilized, some students who have special needs may be overlooked. A method developed in the Joliet High Schools uses a computerized identification system which has the capacity to list on a teacher's class roster all of the students identified as having a potential handicap or disadvantage. After they have received their rosters, the teachers verify those conditions that affect the students in their classes. Most importantly, the teachers record the treatment and services they provide to help the student overcome the handicap or disadvantage in the particular class. Because the teaching staff has daily contact with students, they are in an excellent position

to help with the identification of students who need special assistance. A process that includes input from several sources is more likely to identify those students with special needs than a system that relies on one source alone. For example, the identification system used in the Network sites includes referral input from students, parents, vocational teachers, special education teachers, guidance staff and administrators. Many of the sites felt that it was a mark of success when students themselves identified their special needs and requested additional help.

Once students in regular classes have been identified as having special needs, steps can be taken to plan their educational program. It may be necessary to conduct further student evaluation before an educational plan can be developed. Comprehensive vocational evaluation methods have been used as the basis for planning the individualized instructional program. In some of the Network Sites commercial evaluation systems were used such as the Singer Graflex and Hester Evaluation Systems. This "hands-on" work sample approach was combined with the results of tests, interest aptitude tests, student interviews, parent interviews, and job "try-outs." The results of the vocational evaluation program were then used to plan activities that could help a student use his or her strengths in the vocational class. Supplemental activities were also scheduled to help the student improve in any weak areas discovered through evaluation and observation. For example, a typing student who was found to have functional use of only one hand, was scheduled with an instructor who had learned to teach typing to one-handed students.

Individualization of this type is facilitated by the use of performance objectives. Ideally, these objectives are developed cooperatively by the vocational teacher and the special teachers. This approach is used at

Tilden High School in Chicago. At Tilden, special educators visit their students' occupational classes weekly. Individually tailored assistance plans are designed to help the student develop specific occupational skills. The weekly plans are used by the occupational instructor and by the special educator to reinforce specific vocational competencies. This cooperative-instructional approach has greatly increased the rate of success of the mainstreamed student.

Several alternative approaches of providing support services to students within the mainstream of the regular program were utilized by the Network. A common element in all of the approaches was the need for a cooperative planning effort among the personnel serving the student. Efforts were made to include the vocational teacher, the special teacher and guidance counselor in planning a program to meet individual needs.

The inclusion of the guidance counselor on the support team was stressed in the Springfield High Schools through the use of SCOPE. SCOPE is an acronym for Suggested Career Occupational Program Electives. The SCOPE project contains career information and career planning activities. The results of assessment are used to help the student explore possible career interests. As career areas are determined, a sequential program of coursework is designed for the student. The SCOPE manual contains a summary of the coursework available in the school district and suggests a logical sequence for student enrollment in courses related to specific career interests.

In some situations it was found that additional support personnel needed to be hired to effectively carry out the objectives of the individually planned program. Most mainstreamed students require some kind of supportive services once they are enrolled in a regular class.

Herrin Community High School tried To Improve the Probability of Success for all exceptional students through Project TIPS. TIPS utilized a support team of para-professionals called MENTORS. The mentors helped students improve their knowledge in areas such as reading, math and study skills. Students also received encouragement in the acquisition of social skills. The mentors therefore served as tutors, confidants, and as advocates of the student. They provided that extra assistance that was found to be needed to help a student achieve.

The provision of support services alone may not be enough to help some students. It may be necessary to modify the existing curriculum to accommodate special needs students. One Network Site developed a new procedure to ensure the needs of special students were considered in the annual curriculum review. Another site developed a totally new curriculum in pre-employment skills. The pre-employment curriculum was designed to teach skills that would help a student find and keep a job. The pre-employment curriculum was taught by vocational teachers as an integral part of the vocational class. This example reflects the overall intent of the curriculum modification process--that of encouraging teachers to modify and use special techniques in the regular vocational classroom. Competency based instruction, learning activity packets, and taped textbooks are examples of some of the techniques used by teachers to implement curriculum goals.

The cooperative planning approach was facilitated through inservice education activities. Inservice education proved to be a valuable vehicle for accomplishing the many services needed by mainstreamed students. It assisted teachers in planning individualized programs for vocational students. Needs assessment activities were first conducted by the Network

Sites to obtain "grass roots" involvement of the staff regarding the inservice education plan. The information obtained through Needs Assessment was then used to design the content of inservice programs. In some cases, the focus of inservice was on the modification of curriculum, instructional materials or teaching techniques. At other times the focus of inservice was the development of teacher attitudes favorable to working with handicapped and disadvantaged students. Whatever the focus of inservice, the assessment of teacher needs resulted in improved services to students and to increased staff support of the special needs program.

Not all of the services needed by mainstreamed students are found within the walls of the school building. Community resources can provide the link between in-school training and on-the-job placement. Mt. Prospect District 214 involved the community in its mainstreaming program. Community resources provided career exploration and on-the-job training for students through programs such as Police Cadet and Fire Cadet. Thus, the students in District 214 have the opportunity to be educated in the least restrictive environment there is--the community itself.

The community can also assist local schools through participation in a Citizens Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee can provide practical information concerning the employment opportunities and needs of the community. Community involvement results in occupational programs that are realistic for the future employment of special needs youth. An added advantage of the Citizens Advisory Committee is an increase in the community support of the special needs program. This support is particularly important if the program is to become a long term integral service in the schools and community.

It should be kept in mind that not all students are ready for a mainstreamed environment. For some students, mainstreaming may be inappropriate and may result in failure. This was determined to be the case for some of the students at the Rockford Area Vocational Center. So Rockford implemented a system which provided program accessibility to even the most severely handicapped. An Orientation Program, specifically designed for the handicapped, allows students to explore seven of eleven different programs offered at the Area Vocational Center. Students attend classes in each of seven career interest areas throughout the year. This type of program helps students explore career areas and further define their interests and abilities. The program at Rockford demonstrates that a student's needs can be served in occupational education regardless of his placement along the mainstreaming continuum.

As can be seen, the mainstreaming concept has been implemented in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. The number of approaches to mainstreaming is probably unlimited. But in order to be successful, mainstreaming requires a balance of systematic planning, cooperative instructional services, and inservice education.

One final question should be asked. Did the activities described in this paper contribute to effective programming for students? To answer that question, it is important to look at another essential component of program planning: evaluation. Each of the Network sites included extensive evaluation activities in their program plans. The evaluation of services took many forms. For example, surveys were administered to students, parents, teachers and administrators to assess their perceptions of the services provided. Follow-up surveys and job placement rates were also examined in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness

of vocational training in helping students obtain jobs. One site collected evaluative data which indicated that the high school drop-out rate had decreased and that class attendance had increased since the beginning of the special needs program. This information indicates that progress is beginning to be made toward accomplishing the goal of improving the quality of vocational programs for handicapped students.

Now that the data is in, the Illinois Network is anxious to share its experience. The demonstration of quality programs is a goal of each of the sites involved in the Illinois Network. The Network staff will be happy to assist local districts with the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs. Through the demonstration process, it is hoped that the groundwork can be laid for a more successful future for students with special needs. By working together, this goal may become a reality for students in your district.

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